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THE YOUNG MAN FROM JERUSALEM

WILLIAM G. BALLANTINE



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THE YOUNG MAN FROM JERUSALEM

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BY
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BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1921

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OCT 26 1921

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I

I WAS standing on a corner of the avenue waiting for a trolley when a nice-looking young man asked me a question about the cars for Thompsonville. Something foreign in his air and his accent puzzled me, and so I asked, at a venture, "Are you a Greek?" "No," he replied, "I am a Syrian from Jerusalem."

For a moment I looked at him in silence while the sublime suggestions of that holy name swept over my mind. Here was one who had been born and had grown up where

"Walked those blessed feet
Which nineteen hundred years ago were nailed
For our advantage on the bitter cross."

How real Jesus must be to him!

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Then I said, "Things are going to be better in Jerusalem now, are n't they — now that the Turks have been driven out?" "No," he replied, "they will be worse. The country is going to be given over to the Jews. I should like to go back there and kill about ten Jews." "Why," I asked, "do you hate the Jews so?" "The Jews killed God," he said. "What is *your* religion?" I asked. "I am a Christian of the Orthodox Greek Church — the same as the Russian Church," he replied.

Just then my car came and I had to go. But how I wished that I might have a little quiet time with that bright young man and tell him what Jesus lived for! He is so well satisfied with his membership in an ancient orthodox Christian church. And yet that church has given him no inkling of what Christianity really is. It has taught him dogma and hate. Jesus never wished to kill anybody. He forgave his murderers.

II

WHAT I would have tried to say to that young man, had opportunity permitted, is what I am going to try to say now, hoping that at least a few may find it helpful. But it is like trying to describe sunlight. The very simplicity of the matter creates a difficulty at which my heart sinks.

Jesus lived by Four Principles : —

- I. Inclusive Love ;
- II. Humble Service ;
- III. Freedom ; and
- IV. Common Sense.

These Four Principles are all there is of Christianity, and the only hope of mankind is in their final universal prevalence over the earth.

Back of the Principles lay, in the mind of Jesus, Three Fundamental Beliefs : —

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- I. God is like Men, only greater;
- II. Men are like God, only smaller;
- III. God and Men can find happiness only in
Eternal Mutual Love.

Jesus assumed the essential likeness of God and Men. He held that whatever good thing is true of any man must be all the more true of God. If an earthly father gives good gifts to his children, how much more will the heavenly Father do so—better gifts and more promptly. If no earthly father can be happy while one child strays naked and hungry, no more can God. If the supreme joy of an earthly father is the restoration of the lost, then that must be the supreme joy of God.

According to Jesus, every human being is a child of God, babies as much as grown-ups, women as much as men, the ignorant as much as the wise, Samaritans as much as Jews, sinners as really as saints.

To be a child of God is an unalienable

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attribute of humanity. Into the spiritual likeness of God, every human being is born, and he has the same faculties of thinking, feeling, and willing, the same fundamental intuitions of the good, the beautiful, and the true, the same imperative need of love, that God has.

That every human being is immortal and that the supreme question of each immortal life is its harmony with God was to Jesus so plain that it hardly occurred to him to make a separate affirmation of it. Deny it and the whole shining sphere of his thinking would vanish like a soap bubble.

All followers of Jesus naturally accept his beliefs. But it is not the acceptance of these beliefs that makes them Christians. It is their living out his principles. Beliefs lie in the region of the intellect. Character depends on the heart. It is not what we think, but what we do, that counts. St. James tells us in his epistle that the demons hold a perfectly ortho-

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dox notion of God. They are in a world where mistake on that point is impossible. The truth blazes before their eyes. But it only makes them shudder ; it does not make them love.

III

THE first of Jesus' Four Principles is Inclusive Love. Note that word "inclusive."

Before his time people loved their wives, their children, their friends, their country. But love always found a boundary, and beyond that boundary stretched in every direction the dark continent of hate. Jesus loved everybody. Of all men that ever lived, he was the first who dared to draw a great circle of love including all men and God.

The Old Testament went far, but never so far as this. The Jews learned from it splendid virtues—justice, purity, courage, generosity, neighborliness, family affection, patriotism, piety, heroism, the constancy of martyrs; but not all-inclusive love. One psalmist exclaimed, "Do not I hate them, O Jehovah, that hate thee? And am not I

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grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred. They are become mine enemies." Another psalmist, homesick in exile, exclaimed, "Daughter of Babylon, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us! Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock!" Jesus lived on a wholly different plane.

Eminent scholars often miss the obvious things. Some of them seem ready to admit that there was nothing really new in what Jesus had to *say*. His ideas had been held by many prophets and sages. They think that the work of Jesus was to make some mystical, tragic, bloody expiation for sin, or to reveal an incarnate God.

They fail to see that Jesus, by his Four Principles, liberated and ennobled all the powers of all the people of all the world and united them in one blessed immortal family of one heavenly Father.

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Students of Comparative Religion sometimes say, with a superior air of cosmopolitan intelligence, that each of the great religions has some great contribution to make to the final world religion. Probably this is true in a sense. I make no pretense to expert knowledge in this field. But after a pretty careful search through the encyclopædia articles and the standard handbooks, written by the experts, I have failed so far to find any claim that any religious leader ever grasped these Four Principles or ever lived by them before Jesus did it. The Jews certainly never found them in the Old Testament. They were just as much shocked at them as the Greeks and Romans were.

Jesus is incomparably the most original thinker of all history. Rightly, we date the years of our calendar from his birth, for his birth was the sunrise of humanity. Since his time an ever-increasing number, often, alas,

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purbblind through theology, have lived in fellowship with him and for his ends. His life was so radiant with all that can stimulate goodness and satisfy the deepest instincts of the soul that many have caught its spirit who could not analyze its secret and would, indeed, have been frightened at any clear statement of its principles.

IV

JESUS included in his love people of every age and class. He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them. Since that time a heavenly glory circles the head of every little child with a radiance unseen before. The pictures of Jesus with the little children in his arms are the sweetest of all the pictures of him. No wonder that the birthday of Jesus is the festival of the glorification of childhood. Did you ever think why this is so?

Jesus was the first man in history to recognize the sacredness of every woman. He was the first perfect gentleman, the founder of ideal Chivalry. Since his time, we measure every man's claim to the title of gentleman

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by his attitude toward women. This was n't so before. David was not measured by any such standard, nor Socrates nor Cæsar. But now no man who thinks lightly of women, though he be a poet like Goethe or a musician like Wagner, can seem to us a gentleman.

Until Jesus' time there was a double moral standard, if for men there could be said to be any standard at all. But since Jesus stooped and wrote with his finger on the ground of the temple court while a circle of conscience-stricken men melted away one by one and left the accused woman alone with the Saviour, the world's standard has quietly changed. Before his time it had never occurred to anybody that a sinful girl could ever be forgiven. There is, indeed, in the Old Testament, one passage — only one and that very doubtful — where some think that they find the idea. It is in the Book of Hosea. But the most natural interpretation is that the Prophet is giving an

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allegorical representation of the Jewish nation's unfaithfulness and restoration, not thinking of hope for any individual fallen woman.

In old times love to sinners was regarded as a fault, not as a virtue. It was a moral weakness. When a Hebrew psalmist drew up a list of the qualities that make up an ideal character, he, of course, represented him as one "in whose eyes a reprobate is despised." John the Baptist was a type of good old-fashioned righteousness. He was too holy to touch elbows with common men on crowded streets, and so kept out in the deserts alone until duty compelled him to come in to denounce sinners and call them to repentance. Jesus was the first among religious leaders to set the example of genial *camaraderie*. He accepted social invitations without any nice questioning as to who would be at the table. It scandalized the pious to see him dining with low company and not even shrinking from the touch of the

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unchaste. He was referred to with disgust as "the friend of sinners."

The ancient world had little care for the feeble. Plato was interested only in the strong. He thought that unpromising babies should be exposed and that invalids had better hurry up and die. But blindness, lameness, paralysis, or any other bodily trouble always touched the heart of Jesus. He gave his time mainly to the relief of physical distress. The vast array of hospitals, asylums, and organizations for welfare that now bless Christian lands, and are being spread by missionaries into the darker regions, all find their spring in what he said and did.

V

UNTIL the time of Jesus, love always stopped at racial boundaries, generally at the boundary of one's own race. Sometimes, there was a "most favored nation clause" which permitted a little partiality toward some admired or useful neighbors such as Hiram, King of Tyre, and his craftsmen. But the rule was hate for aliens. No attempt was made by any prophet of the Old Testament to inculcate love for every human being everywhere without regard to age, sex, race, morals, or religion. Far from it. The Jews divided the world into Jews and "Dogs." The Greeks divided it into Greeks and "Barbarians." The Chinese divide it into Chinese and "foreign devils." Christians alone do not divide it.

But the objection is made that we cannot

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love everybody. "Would you have us love the Kaiser?"

By the word "love" Jesus did not mean admiration or liking. He meant only the supreme desire to benefit, to promote the welfare of every other person, to help every other person to realize his own highest possibilities and rise to the purpose of God in his creation. Jesus started with the perception of the essentially godlike nature of every man. He saw the immeasurable value of personality — every personality. He saw that our Creator can never wear a worthy crown until every one of his jewels, every human soul, is set in it — a flawless diamond.

What would a Christian do with the Kaiser? Would he enjoy seeing him tortured, bending over the battlements of heaven to look at the Kaiser in hell? Jonathan Edwards might think so, but we cannot. No, we would lift the Kaiser, and every lost soul like him, out

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of their midnight of hate and set them in a true "place in the sun" — the transforming sunshine of God's love.

Until Jesus' time, society felt only hot indignation against those who dared to break law. Criminals had forfeited all rights of humanity and had no ground of complaint if they were flung into dark, cold, wet, filthy dungeons to lie and rot. The treatment of prisoners is one of the infamies of the hideous past. But at last light begins to irradiate even the dungeons. It all comes from the face of Jesus as it is reflected in the faces of such men as Thomas Mott Osborne.

That a nation is no more under the law of love than a tiger is, and that any nation that is strong enough has a natural right to rise upon the bloody ruins of all other nations, was Prussian doctrine. The thought of Jesus is just the opposite. A league of nations is the latest, sublimest conception in govern-

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ment — a league which shall abolish war and guarantee to every feeblest group of our race safety and a share in all of the best things. The league of nations is the political expression of Jesus' principle of all-inclusive love.

Not "America first" any more than "Deutschland ueber alles"! No; James Russell Lowell long ago echoed the true sentiment in his Yankee dialect, —

"An' 'All men up,' say we,
White, yaller, black and brown, John :
Now which is your idee"?

"All men up" is the only possible idea for Christians.

VI

JESUS loved God in the same direct personal way in which he loved men. "Inclusive love," of course, included God, the greatest and the most lovable of all.

Christianity is by no means "mere ethics." That is, it is not just the application of the Golden Rule to human relations. It is, first of all, a vital companionship with the infinite personality in whom we live and move and have our being.

No one has begun to understand Jesus who does not perceive that the companionship of God was the supreme abiding fact of his inner life. When Jesus walked in the fields he walked in God's world with God. The lilies were wearing the finer-than-royal raiment in which God had clothed them. The birds were feeding on what his love had scattered

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for them. Even the falling sparrow, apparently abandoned to a cruel fate, was not really outside the heavenly Father's tender care.

And far beyond the worth of many sparrows was the worth to God of every human son and daughter of his, even the most darkly sin-stained. Participation in the joy of God over every returning penitent inspired and sustained the heart of Jesus in all his tireless seeking and saving of the lost. Into the parable of the Prodigal Son he crystallized, as into the world's purest jewel of literature, the supreme article of his faith and the supreme motive of his life.

To Jesus the heart of the Gospel was not his own cross. It was the boundless love of God and the coming of God's kingdom of love among men. God was inviting, welcoming, saving.

“There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea.”

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But to-day a good many people, and especially those of the educated class, find it almost impossible to believe in this love of God and to reciprocate it in a personal way. At this point they cannot follow Jesus. His way of thinking about God seems to them to belong to the childhood of the world. They call it "anthropomorphic." Science, they say, has pushed the boundaries of the universe so far outward, has enlarged so vastly all of our conceptions, has revealed so many complexities, such tremendous energies and such inexorable laws, that the notions of the time of Jesus will not do any longer. And particularly, they think, the notion of a God "like a man, only far greater," has been absolutely outgrown.

But is this so? Of course in saying, "a God like a man," we do not mean a God with a body like a man's. We mean a God who is spiritually like us.

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What is science but our unraveling of the thought that runs through the universe? Crystals in all their variety can be classified according to our geometry. The stars in their courses move according to our mathematics. So there is thought in the universe, and it is thought just like ours, only finer and vaster. And there is beauty in the universe just such as our hearts love. And there is undeniably "a force not ourselves that makes for righteousness" — righteousness that accords with our consciences.

Now, soberly, what are these but the proofs of a personality like our own? If the universe were not made by a thinker like us, we could not make sciences. If he were not infinitely greater than we, he could not make the universe.

Obviously creation is a process now in progress. We see it evolving. Whether it ever had a beginning or will ever have an

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end, we have no basis for assertion. But we find ourselves now in a universe which reveals a living God.

Sir Isaac Newton said that in accounting for anything we must assume a "*vera causa*"; that is, we must assume something like what we know to be a real cause in similar cases. Now of all things what each of us knows best is personality. We know it far better than we know matter. Each one of us wakes at the beginning of life to the consciousness that he is thinking, feeling, and willing; that is, he is a person. Each one finds that he has a certain amount of power at his disposal. To assume that the thought and power we see manifested about us belong to personality is to assume the only "*vera causa*" with which we have any acquaintance.

We cannot claim to see God. But then we never see any person. We see material bodies acting in such ways that, judging from the

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analogy of ourselves, we have no doubt that persons are expressing themselves through them. Every now and then one or another of these bodies ceases so to act. And then, although the body is there just the same as before, we infer that the person has departed and we call the body dead. So the body never was the person. It was merely a machine which the person temporarily used.

We can see God just as truly as we can see any other person. For we can see the things on which he acts. Imagine some favored individual to have been admitted often into the studio of the sculptor Saint-Gaudens, but only when the artist was away. Day after day he would have seen those wonderful statues taking shape, Sherman, Farragut, Lincoln, and the rest. He would have come to know intimately the great patriotic heart of the man whose chief ambition was to put into deathless bronze the noblest traits of the no-

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blest Americans. If finally this visitor had been permitted to meet Saint-Gaudens, would he not have felt that he already knew the sculptor from his works as he never could know him from looking at his face and figure?

So we may know God, if only we allow ourselves, as Jesus did, to see him in the lilies and the birds, and in the souls of men.

“That delicate forest flower,
With scented breath and look so like a smile,
Seems, as it issues from the shapeless mould,
An emanation of the indwelling Life,
A visible token of the upholding Love,
That are the soul of this great universe.”

“Seems,” yes, it undoubtedly *is*, “the visible token” which Bryant took it to be.

Many people feel that the word “personality” in some way connotes limitation. This, however, is not the case. Some stars are small; but the word “star” does not necessarily imply smallness. One star differs from

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another star in glory and there are stars that outshine the sun. So with personalities. Some are, indeed, small and act now only through little human bodies. But there is no philosophic difficulty in believing that there is one transcendent personality.

When even a faint apprehension of the Infinite Personality begins to dawn on a soul, then the reasonableness of the first commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength," becomes self-evident, and the glad, spontaneous impulse to give that love becomes irresistible.

Many good people, unable to think satisfactorily about God, are trying to satisfy their hearts with love of their fellow men. Abou ben Adhem, in Leigh Hunt's charming poem, troubled to find that his name is not on the roll of those who love the Lord, begs humbly

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to be written by the angel as one who loves his fellow men. The next night he finds to his joy that his name leads on the roll of those whom love of God has blessed.

A great truth is poetically expressed here, but it is often misunderstood. The truth is that every loving heart loves God, even though not aware of it. The poet does not mean that the Infinite comes to personality only in the finite, and that so love to men is love to God. That is a pantheistic conception very far from the mind of Jesus.

Some suppose that they think more modernly and more worthily of God by making him an abstraction. They say, "God is not a person, he is Truth." Such people should examine a little more closely into the meaning of words. "Truth" is but the relation between fact and the representation of fact. A portrait has truth if it is like the sitter. To say that God is truth is to use words without meaning.

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Undeniably grave difficulties rise in the way of accepting Jesus' belief about God. Unsolved problems confront us on every hand. How shall we account for the agony and death of millions? Dark and dreadful enigmas, apparently irreconcilable with the supposition that love rules the universe, stand like rows of sphinxes on either hand as we approach his throne. The sparrow falls on the ground and it does not seem to him, or to the other sparrows, as if any one cared.

But could we, newcomers on this shore, fairly expect to understand the whole continent all at once? Every baby on the threshold of life, after countless sweet proofs of mother's love, comes to the day of weaning. Then mother seems to forget. The baby faces the terrible dilemma of accepting a dark mystery or giving up faith in mother. In the end he always chooses to hold on to mother; and the baby is right.

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When all the dreadful enigmas have been admitted, there remains a vast preponderance of evidence for good. Take the one fact of motherhood. Consider the millions on millions of mothers who at this hour, after paying the initiation fee of anguish, and now worn down by incessant care and loss of sleep, start up at every feeble cry to attend the baby, feed the baby, smile at the baby, croon to the baby—consider this amazing miracle of pure love going on night and day all over the world, and then doubt, if you can, that Love is the strongest force in the world.

So we find that reasoning upon the data of modern science, far from weakening, powerfully reënforces, the ancient faith in a personal God, just like ourselves except that he is Infinite, Fountain of all energy, Thinker whose thoughts Science reverently thinks after him, Creator of beauty whose loveliness

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Art ceaselessly labors to reflect, perfect in love and so approved by every human conscience.

But we are not left to analogies and scientific inferences. We have independent, direct, and mystical evidence of God. There is a kind of perception which is not one of the five senses that connect us with the material world. By this we perceive that God is near. A great many people have this perception of God and yet do not dare to trust it.

But he who would fly must dare to leave the ground. Spiritual things must be known spiritually. Why spend years in the valley of the shadow of death and never dare to say, "Thou art with me"? In all the ages no one who has ventured to trust the normal instincts of his own soul has ever failed to feel beneath him the everlasting arms. It is for each one of us for himself to make the great adventure of faith — no reckless self-delusion, but the

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most calm and reasonable act possible to man.

At this point my reader may be ready to break out with the remonstrance that this marvelous soul-passion, so tender, so responsive, so loyal, so strong — gentle enough to enfold a child and daring enough to lay hold on the Infinite — that this conception goes far beyond any reasonable definition of the common little word “Love.”

No, our ideas are enlarging all the time, but that does not require the invention of new names. The word “star” means far more now than it did on the plains of old Chaldæa; but it is still good enough.

When Jesus talked, using common speech, his vocabulary marched forth like a procession of angels. Men rose from sitting at his feet and found such words as “father,” “son,” “husband,” “wife,” “neighbor” — even the despised name “Samaritan” —

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permanently transfigured. And so the common word "Love," so long profaned on unclean lips, has been redeemed and glorified and empowered to express the noblest thing on earth and in heaven.

VII

THE second Fundamental Principle of Jesus is Humble Service. Love, which is his first principle, is but the will to service. So the second principle is in a way merely the first in action. Christian love is far from being mere pleasant feeling and indulgent good nature. It is dynamic. It sees needs and hastens to supply them. No task is too repulsive. Where filth is and vermin and foul air and infection and threatening death, there Love enters in a white robe and with a red cross on her breast, gentle and patient and unterrified.

Service alone is greatness, Jesus said. No titles, honors, decorations, or offices that others can bestow on a man can in the least degree make him great. Jesus told his followers that even he had no power to promote any favorites to seats of honor. Popular usage attaches the title "The Great" to many

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names in history. We hear of Alexander the Great, Herod the Great, Peter the Great of Russia, and Frederick the Great of Prussia. But the title only indicates that they had power. A man may be great as a prize-fighter, as a soldier, as an artist, and yet be personally a small man. Mere possession of powers and talents no more enlarges a man than the mere legal ownership of millions of money. Absolute greatness can be nothing but moral greatness, and that is nothing but the spirit of loving service. Napoleon probably possessed the greatest military and administrative genius of all history. But Napoleon himself was an unusually small man, belittled by selfishness.

Jesus came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom. This was his greatness. It was the whole of his greatness. For many centuries, the stories of his miracles were unquestioned and they were relied on as proofs of his greatness. Then, as

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modern physical science advanced, many thoughtful people ceased to believe in miracles. Now, under the influence of Sir Oliver Lodge and scientists of his type, the pendulum of opinion seems swinging back somewhat toward faith. There is here an exceedingly interesting historical and scientific question; but it does not bear closely on the greatness of Jesus. If he was really able to walk on the water, to still a storm, and to create food, that does not much concern us. The compassion that he felt for that multitude of ignorant, shepherdless, suffering peasants—such sympathy as no man of genius in all previous history had ever felt for a common crowd—that compassion made him great. It is that compassion kindling from breast to breast that is going to save the world. Any man who will take the trouble to learn the laws of nature, any Edison or Marconi, can work miracles.

VIII

THE third and fourth Fundamental Principles of Jesus are Freedom, and Common Sense. These must be considered together because they cannot be understood apart. Which comes logically first, it is idle to discuss. Love is the mainspring of the Christian life. Humble Service is its necessary expression. The truer the love the humbler will be the service. Mother love stops at nothing. It is therefore our highest ideal of love. But what shall the Christian who feels love's impulse have as a programme of life?

The various great religions have imposed upon the faithful many ceremonial duties. They have required temples, sacrifices, processions, asceticisms, sacred celebrations, and what not. The Jewish law, the "Torah," built up by the ingenuity of generations of

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rabbis until it now fills twelve folio volumes, makes the whole of life a meticulous ritual. Christian churches, claiming the authority of Jesus, have also elaborated their burdensome systems. But what has the burning of wax candles in churches to do with the Four Principles? Jesus knew of nothing that God wants of us except service to his other children.

What shall a Christian proceed to do? Jesus would say, "Open your eyes to the needs of people around you. Look as I did on the sheep that have no shepherd. Think out the problem of service according to your own common sense in perfect freedom. Let no venerable tradition handed down from the fathers, no supposed divine law in Holy Scripture, lead you to do anything that seems useless or unkind or unreasonable, or inhibit the impulse to anything that seems good."

His ideas of freedom and common sense

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were just as astounding to the people of that time as his ideas of loving everybody and becoming great only by service. In fact these four ideas were so novel and so contrary to ordinary thinking that even the Christian Church through the long centuries of its history has hardly lived by them at all. The Orthodox Greek Church, which educated that young man in Jerusalem, gave him no vision of any one of them. Dare we talk of freedom and common sense where immemorial tradition of the pious has inculcated unquestioning faith?

IX

THE Sabbath was an unspeakably precious and sacred institution to the Jews. Rather than violate its holy rest many had suffered even unto death and had endured what was worse than death, the pain of seeing the sufferings of loved ones whom on that day it would have been a sin to relieve. For the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy was one of the "Ten Words," the center and citadel of the law. "In it thou shalt not do any work," was the mandate and no exception was suggested as possible.

Once, when Jesus' disciples were hungry on the Sabbath, they, with his sanction, plucked the heads of grain and ate. This was undeniably work. So the whole question of Sabbath-keeping and the larger question of exact obedience to Bible words had to be faced.

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What Jesus virtually said to those people was: "If you were free to use your own common sense in this case, what would you do? Well, you are free, in this and in every case. No matter what the law *says*. It must have been intended for the good of man. So, whenever you think that you can do more good to man by ignoring the words of the law, do so. Common sense is the only infallible rule of faith and practice." After such amazing sentiments what could Jesus expect but death? As the Jews viewed it, he was trying to sweep away the whole foundation of revealed religion.

It had not occurred to them that it might be possible to look through the outward letter of the law into its spirit and to criticize the letter by the spirit. To them every rule was a separate, inexplicable, independent, immutable fiat of Jehovah.

Consider the matter of food. To eat cor-

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rect food, "kosher" food, was to a Jew just as much a part of religion as honesty or chastity. Pork was absolutely forbidden. Many Jewish martyrs had died rather than take the flesh of "the unclean animal" into their mouths. No one thought of asking, "What is wrong with pork?" God had tabooed it. "Theirs not to reason why" any more than if they had belonged to the Light Brigade. Jesus said: "Let us think this thing out. Food goes through the alimentary canal and out, does n't it? Then it never touches the seat of personality, does it? So no food can defile a man morally, can it?"

Thus he applied common sense to all religious taboos. In so doing he canceled two chapters in the Bible. But what of that?

X

JESUS was the first absolutely free man that ever walked the earth. He looked with his own eyes. He thought with his own brains. He never did anything that his own common sense did not approve. The Quakers, in their doctrine of the "Inner Light," have come very near to his idea. No ancient custom, no rule of Holy Scripture, bound Jesus further than he could see the reasonableness of it in his situation.

One day in the year all pious adult Jews in good health abstain from food for the whole twenty-four hours. It is an inviolable custom. There are also minor fasts. Once, when a fast day came round, Jesus' disciples went on eating as usual. "Why don't they fast?" exclaimed the scandalized beholders. "They don't feel like it to-day," was the nonchalant reply.

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The astounding freedom of Jesus has been as little understood and as little acted upon by professed Christians as his all-inclusive love. The other day, in reading "Adventures in Friendship," by David Grayson, I was delighted to run across an admirable statement of this principle which so well fits our purpose that I must take the liberty of quoting it. I like it all the better because Ray Stannard Baker does not seem conscious that he is presenting one of the four fundamentals of Christianity :

"I believe in the Open Road in religion, in education, in politics : there is nothing really settled, fenced in, nor finally decided upon this earth. Nothing that is not questionable. I do not mean that I would immediately tear down well-built fences or do away with established and beaten roads. By no means. The wisdom of past ages is likely to be wiser than any hasty conclusion of mine. I would not

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invite any other person to follow my road until I had well proven it a better way toward truth than that which time had established. And yet I would have every man tread the Open Road. I would have him upon occasion question the smuggest institution and look askance upon the most ancient habit. I would have him throw a doubt upon Newton and defy Darwin. I would have him look straight at men and nature with his own eyes.”¹

Freedom is not a mere corollary from Christianity, an incidental deduction, a matter aside, a small bonus distributed to holders of preferred stock. It is part of the original essence of Christianity. It is one of the four columns that sustain the central dome. Without it Christianity is sure sooner or later to degenerate into a formalism, a superstition, a bigotry, a bondage, an inquisition, a blind hatred, a machine of tyranny.

¹ *Adventures in Friendship*, by David Grayson, page 52.

XI

THE principle of common-sense freedom with which Jesus handled the laws of the Old Testament is obviously universal and must be applied in the same way to his own sayings. Many Christians have followed Jesus so far as to break away from bondage to the letter of the Old Testament who dare not break away from the letter of the New. They treat the New Testament in the same mechanical way in which the Jews treated the Old. So they escape Jewish literalism only to fall into Christian literalism, which is as bad, or worse.

For Jesus was fond of Oriental hyperbole; that is, stating his points in the boldest imagery possible and leaving the necessary "reservations" to the intelligence of the hearer. He seemed to wish to startle his hearers into

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thinking. So his word pictures are like poster drawings. And he never went back to modify any extravagant statement or mention the exceptions. The nearest he ever came to qualification was to make a second extravagant statement flatly contradicting the first.

Treating these rhetorical exaggerations of Jesus like sober rules, Christian priests have converted the "law of liberty" into something worse than the Jewish "yoke of bondage."

Take the matter of divorce. Jesus declared without qualification that there should be no divorce. He was aiming at the protection of the home. Marriage, he taught, is instituted by God and must not be dissolved at the whim of man. But Christian priests have refused to apply common sense here, just as the rabbis refused to apply common sense to the law of the Sabbath. Claiming to be guided by reverence for the words of Jesus,

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they have refused to free pure women from degenerate and diseased men, and have thought that by so doing they were enhancing the sacredness of marriage in popular esteem ! Oh, the hideous, sanctimonious cruelty by which uncounted thousands of innocent people have been made martyrs in the name of the Saviour whose only thought was freedom !

XII

THE whole painful trouble of Pacifism arises from the same distressing confusion of many noble minds, the failure to see that Jesus would have us apply common sense to his rhetoric. For the most part these people do use their common sense. The Quakers do not give away all their property to the first beggar who asks for it, although Jesus in words commands this in the very paragraph in which he teaches non-resistance. What a pity to apply common sense only to one part of the paragraph and not the other part !

Common sense is just as indispensable to Christianity as love is, just as an intelligent driver is as necessary to an automobile as gasoline in the engine. Love impels, but common sense must steer. What a waste of industry has been made in investigating what

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the Bible says on practical questions, when a brief application of common sense to the situation would have cleared up everything! Wisdom can never be reached by the mere study of words, even the words of Jesus.

XIII

COMMON SENSE is the same thing as science. Science is rationalized knowledge. Men have the power to observe, classify, generalize, and infer. Common sense is the normal action of the mind on all the facts that can be observed. There are not two roads to the knowledge of duty—the Bible road and the scientific road. The rules which the Bible contains are to be used in the light of science or they cannot be used rightly at all. It is a mistake to say that science confirms the Bible, or that the Bible harmonizes with science. They are not two contrasted things. Christianity commands us to use science to find out what is Christian. It does not undertake to tell us what duty is but says, Ask science.

Whether Sunday baseball is right never can be settled by studying the Bible. It can

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only be settled by studying in the light of the Bible the needs of the men who are going to play it and of the crowd that is going to watch the game. Had Jesus regarded only the words of the fourth commandment he would have left the hungry and the sick unrelieved. A Christian must have eyes. He must have courage. He must be a Pragmatist, and when he finds something in Scripture that won't work, he must discover for himself something else that will work.

Many of the most foolish and cruel things in history have been done by sincere men who did not understand the four elementary principles of Jesus and who thought they were doing his will when they shut off the light of their own intelligence and denied divorces to outraged women or refused to fight to protect the weak from armed ruffians.

An eminent missionary from India told me that in that country many families have been

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broken up and many wives cast out to degradation and destitution because the missionaries insist that every follower of Jesus shall be baptized. The Hindoos are willing enough that their wives shall lead Christian lives, but ancient prejudice forbids that they should consent to a ceremony like this, which is just on the level of their own heathen rites. The missionaries, however, standing firm on the words of Jesus, refuse to dispense with the form.

There are good scholars who doubt whether Jesus ever gave that command for baptism with the trinitarian formula which stands in the last chapter of Matthew. It seems to have too much of the theological and ritualistic flavor of the next generation. But be that as it may, even if he did give the injunction, his own great principle would justify us in using common sense in the application of it.

When I was a child we used to commit to

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memory and recite Mrs. Hemans's thrilling poem about the boy that "stood on the burning deck." These verses were supposed to celebrate the highest type of boyish fidelity. Young Casabianca's father, the captain of a French ship at the battle of the Nile, had stationed the boy at a certain post on the deck. In the progress of the battle the captain was shot; the French were defeated; all the survivors left the ship, which was in flames evidently soon to explode. But the boy would not leave without his father's command and of course perished in the explosion. This ideal of unreasoning faithfulness is just the opposite of Christianity and should not have been held up to us children.

XIV

THESE Four Principles are the “quadrilateral” of fortresses which preserve the integrity of Christianity. Surrender any one of them and at once surprising disasters ensue.

This was made strikingly apparent at the very beginning of Christianity by the case of Saint Paul. He clearly understood three of the principles, but not the fourth. To the first principle, Love, he gave the most beautiful chapter he ever wrote. Of the second principle, Humble Service, his sacrificial life was one long object lesson. The third principle, Freedom, set his enthusiasm into a blaze. In defense of it he wrote a white-hot letter to his Galatian converts, who, under influences emanating from Jerusalem, seemed drifting into the bondage of ritualism. With anathemas, reproaches, sarcasms, theological argu-

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ments, and tender pleadings, he called them back to Christian liberty.

But here Paul himself was at a sad disadvantage. He had never understood the fourth principle—the principle of common sense. He knew that Christians were free, but he did not know why. He was himself Jerusalem-trained, and had the same mechanical conception of law that his opponents had. He had never dared to criticize the law. The unchangeableness of the laws of the Medes and Persians was not so fixed as that of the “Torah.”

What, then, could be the basis of Christian freedom? Paul thought and thought. Jesus had been accustomed to brush aside anything in the law that did not suit him by a simple appeal to common sense. This course was not open to Paul. For him escape from legal bondage was possible only through some legal device. At last he thought out an an-

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swer. The law demanded either obedience or death. Well, there had been a death — the death of Jesus. So the law had been honored, paid off, as it were. Henceforth Christians were free to neglect circumcision, to eat pork, and to work on the Sabbath.

The theory is monstrous. Paul forgot that the punishment of the innocent would be an insult to law, not a satisfaction. He forgot that law is not something like a mortgage that can be paid off, so that the obligation to obey it terminates. And then, too, after having supposedly freed Christians from all obligations under the law, he was always in endless difficulties to explain why only the foolish and antiquated parts of it had lost their force.

In fact the Jews had never had any such perfect divine law as the Jerusalem rabbis had taught Paul to believe they had. In the course of history they had accumulated a lot of regulations, wise and otherwise. Jesus dis-

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posed of the antiquated and senseless ones by epigrams. He said, "You can't put new wine into old skins, can you? You can't patch unshrunk cloth on to old garments, can you? You would n't have people fast at a wedding, would you?" Where Jesus found all the relief he needed in epigrams, Paul was driven to erect vast derricks of theological theory to lift him out of his embarrassments. In fact, Paul himself could never get away from the rabbinic conception of law, and so he embedded that conception in the center of the beautiful message he had received from Jesus. The letter of every law must be enforced, he thought. God himself could forgive no one. Blood was demanded by the law. If not the blood of the guilty, then the blood of the innocent. The curse must fall somewhere. If not on the head of the guilty, then on the head of the innocent. This grisly conception Paul made the heart of his gospel, and for

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the vast majority of Christians it remains the heart of the gospel to this day.

Luther adopted Paul's theory as the essence of the gospel, and with it led off the Reformation into the dry wilderness of theology. Evangelists preach this now. Many of our popular hymns sing it. Instead of singing of love and service and freedom, they sing of substituted punishment, to the dishonor of God and the confusion of men's minds.

Some learned writers think that the idea of freedom, which is so prominent in Mark's story of the life of Jesus, betrays the influence of Saint Paul. Just the opposite. Mark bases freedom on Jesus' principle of common sense—a profound and eternal principle. Paul based freedom on the artificial principle, the legal fiction, of substituted punishment. The freedom wherewith Christ set us free, Paul talked eloquently of, but never understood.

XV

AN observer in an airplane circling the globe, and looking down on the heights and depths of human misery on the several continents, could easily say which one of the principles of Jesus is most conspicuously lacking in each of the lands.

Vast dark areas are in the slavery of ignorance, superstition, and tradition. They need intellectual freedom—the freedom of common sense.

The Chinese are weighed down by exaggerated reverence for their ancestors. In India thousands die every year from snake bite, but superstition forbids the killing of cobras. In Egypt mothers dare not brush away the flies from the eyes of their babies, and so dreadful eye diseases and blindness prevail. In Mexico an illiterate and priest-ridden population is

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trying the hopeless experiment of republican government. Though nominally Christians, they know nothing about intelligence or freedom.

Germany's case is far different from that of these lands. She carried popular education and scientific boldness further than any other nation. But, alas, she left out the principle of all-inclusive love. For love she substituted pride and vanity. The Germans are intelligent enough to kill snakes, but they feed on the poison of hate. No better definition of Hell could be devised than just the German formula — fearless ingenuity and tireless energy in the service of pitiless selfishness. Science unrestrained by love is henceforth the nightmare of the world. Ignorance and superstition are toothless enemies compared with that saber-toothed tiger, educated selfishness.

And America—which of the principles does she lack? All to a painful degree. But

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perhaps most conspicuously the principle of service. Our national danger is eagerness for money for self-indulgence.

Men who were in the army speak of the time they were "in the service." It is a beautiful and most Christian phrase. Laying aside all self-indulgences and personal ambitions, they went to the trenches to do their utmost, even to the giving up of life, if necessary, for their country's flag and all that that flag means. But while they were overseas were we at home less in the service of our country? Were we profiteering, growing rich out of the world's agony, and faring sumptuously every day? And now that those boys have come back can they sink to a less noble plane? No, the whole community must see that every man and woman, in the army or out of it, must be all of the time "in the service" in the very spirit of soldiers. Young men and women in college, considering the

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choice of a life work, are often urged to choose "Christian callings." Any work that meets human need is a Christian calling, one as truly as another, whether it be making laws in Congress or selling shoes or delivering milk or running a moving-picture show. The spirit of love in which it is done and the reality of the need make it Christian service.

A soldier or a minister is not expected to get rich out of his pay. No more right has a banker or a manufacturer. It is hard to decide when to call a man rich ; but certainly one man has no more right to get rich by his "service" than another has.

And no person can be idle and be a Christian at all. A Christian is one who serves. Try to think of Jesus as idle for a day. Why, he was so busy with the relief of sufferers that he had n't time to eat. When a man presents himself for church membership, the official board should ask him, not, "What do you

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believe?" but, "What are you doing for the service of this community and the world?" Before Jesus' time labor was little respected. A mechanic belonged to a caste lower than that of the idle rich, or that of the fighting men. Since Jesus worked at a carpenter's bench, mechanics outshine kings.

XVI

PREACHERS often proclaim in earnest tones that what the world needs is Christ. This is the truth, but spoken indefinitely, it is really an uninforming assertion, and it leaves a very vague notion in the minds of the hearers. Often, we fear, the effect is a kind of mixture of mysticism and pessimism. It is pessimism so far as it leads men to despise ordinary duties and methods, and mysticism so far as it leads them to wait inactive for the coming of the miraculous. In a vague way it is often said that things will never be right in this world until society adopts the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Often the people who say this do not stop to think precisely what those teachings are, but they know that the Golden Rule is among them.

The Sermon on the Mount is for the most

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part a hyperbolic (and very beautiful) statement of the Three Beliefs and the Four Principles, in different aspects. Interpreted without common sense the Sermon on the Mount teaches indiscriminate almsgiving, neglect of provision for a rainy day, refusal to defend the weak from brutes, and many other absurdities. What the fair division of the profits of industry is cannot be learned from the Sermon on the Mount. That must be discovered by scientific study. The Christ whom the world needs is the Christ who lived the Four Principles and inspired men to live them. He never intended the Sermon on the Mount for anything but a series of glorious rhetorical suggestions. He never meant it as a substitute for exact thinking in concrete cases.

XVII

CHAPLAINS and others who attempted religious work among the British and American soldiers in France were astonished to find that the men knew so little about Christianity. They were at a loss to explain this. The blame has been laid on the churches, the ministers, the homes, the Sunday schools, and the public schools. The real explanation is that the Christian public — ministers and laymen alike — have all along been so befogged in their minds. The reason a religious education had not been given to those men before the war broke out was that nobody had it to give or was giving it to anybody.

What do the most regular and faithful Sunday-school scholars learn? Little, indeed: an uncomprehended creed which does not

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mention any one of the Four Principles ; some incidents in the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon ; a little of the geography of Palestine ; a few incidents in the life of Jesus ; a few beautiful texts ; a few fine hymns, and how to celebrate Christmas and Easter.

Could a thin equipment like that prepare a future soldier for the terrific experiences that met him at the front ?

Have you glanced through the catalogue of a theological seminary lately to see what fledgeling ministers are studying to prepare them to guide the laity in their life of love, service, freedom, and common sense ?

Some fine courses are given. And yet for the most part the menu offered is a surprising farrago of things that in the evolution of education have just happened to be stuck in. Most of the subjects have no more to do with what laymen need to know than any other

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university courses that might have been selected at random. No intelligent selective principle is discoverable.

What should a child study to prepare him to live the Christian life? What should a candidate for the Christian ministry study in order to be qualified to guide that child?

In the first place, he should study what will teach him to love. Whatever will soften his heart and enlarge his sympathies and fill him with compassion like that of Jesus is the material we want.

Then will come the nature and needs of man, his body, his mind, his long struggle upward toward light and freedom, and the present conditions of men in all parts of one's own city and of the world. For the Christian life is to be one long service to man.

God has placed us in a material world to work out our destiny here. He is revealed in it. So the study of physical nature as a reve-

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lation of God's character and will must be a part of religious education.

Since common sense is so essential in the Christian life, studies are needed that will develop the open mind, that will cultivate the judgment, that will free from superstition and all mistaken reverence for ancient authority.

The young Christian should be thoroughly instructed in what good men are now doing in the service of mankind and the best up-to-date methods of doing it.

Above all things religious education should deal with the facts of the present, the problems of the individual and of society in our rapidly changing world. Assyriology, now studied in theological seminaries, is pretty remote. The history of the Jews is remote. The geography of Palestine is remote. Sunday-school scholars are taught about the Dead Sea, but in the New Testament that sea is

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never once mentioned. The history of Christian theology is remote. It has hardly more to do with the Christian life of to-day than the history of Alchemy has to do with the manufacture of T.N.T.

XVIII

WILL Christendom ever be reunited? In the sense generally intended by the word, Jesus would have been the last person to wish Christendom united. Union in rites has always meant formalism. Union in ecclesiastical government has always meant tyranny. Union in doctrine — Orthodoxy — has always meant intellectual paralysis and death.

Some warm-hearted people, deeply grieving over the disunion of Christendom and ready to go to the limit in concessions, have proposed that we all agree to require nothing more than faith in the Lord Jesus and baptism in the name of the holy Trinity, and that we recognize as fellow Christians all who meet these two simple conditions. The spirit of the proposal is tender and beautiful. But does not the form of the offer spring from a

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mistake as to the nature of Christianity? Narrowly viewed, is this not a proposal to ignore the Four Principles for which alone Jesus cared, and to make dogma and ritual the basis of fellowship? And would not this test, liberal as it is meant to be, still exclude many sincere followers of Jesus?

XIX

WHAT is to be hoped is that as the mists of misconception clear away, the whole world will see the four great peaks white against the azure background of the three great beliefs. Then men will understand what Christianity is. Then, recognizing one another as brothers in the one great family of God, all will freely advance in ever-increasing intelligence, glad in mutual services, each giving to all and receiving from all in boundless tides of reciprocated blessings. In such a consummation Jesus will see of the travail of his soul and will be satisfied.

THE END

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Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: April 2005

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